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ABSTRACT

This pilot study investigated methods for meeting the needs of children under 2.5 years of age who attend play centers with older children. Also studied were the effects of the toddlers' presence on the other children, parent helpers, and supervisors. Advisors at each of 27 play centers in New Zealand completed a questionnaire with the help of center supervisors and observed a total of 112 children during play center sessions. The questionnaire addressed provisions made for toddlers in regards to supervision, facilities and safety, physical needs, equipment, interactions with adults, and parent education. The questionnaire also addressed the impact of toddlers on other children and adults. Results indicated that: (1) supervisors thought that the centers had suitable equipment for toddlers; (2) transfer of materials from one part of the center to another occurred infrequently; (3) more training workshops were needed; and (4) the presence of both toddlers and older children in centers benefitted children's social development. Results of the observations indicated that more nurturing than obstructive behavior occurred between toddlers and older children, and that adults who interacted with toddlers were usually the child's parents. Appendixes include copies of the study's procedural guidelines, the questionnaire, and a play center observation form. (BC)

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A Collaborative Pilot Study of Children Aged Under Two and a Half Years From Two Regional Playcentre Associations in New Zealand

Valerie N. Podmore

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PREFACE

This collaborative pilot study was initiated by playcentre people who had observed an increase in the number of very young children attending playcentre sessions. The introduction of government funding for children aged under 2 1/2 years attending playcentres also provided an impetus for the study. A preliminary letter from the Education Committee of Playcentre Federation to the early childhood researchers at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research stated:

> Now that Playcentres are given Government funding for the under 2 1/2-year-olds attending our sessions, we feel it would be beneficial to do some effective research on their impact on the centres.
>
> We are thinking along the lines of the effects a session has on the toddlers, and those effects the toddler has on the 3- and 4-year-olds, the parent helpers, and the planning done by the supervisors.
> (October 25, 1988).

The study was carried out by two playcentre associations in consultation with the Education Committee of the New Zealand Playcentre Federation and the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER).

Playcentre people decided on the focus of the research, and participated with Val Podmore (NZCER) in developing the questionnaire and observational schedule. Carol Bowker, who was a member of Federation's Education Committee at the time, was actively involved throughout the planning stages. Beverley Morris, an honorary life member of the New Zealand Playcentre Federation, also contributed to the preliminary planning of the study. Carol Bowker circulated a draft questionnaire to several playcentre associations for comment. Before the data were collected, both the questionnaire and the observational schedule were discussed at the meeting of the Education Committee at Playcentre Conference in May 1990, and they were forwarded to a Maori representative of one association for comments on sensitivity and appropriateness.

The centre advisors and liaison officers from each of the two associations visited the playcentres and collected the data at the end of the second term of 1990. Julie Aitken and Liz Depree co-ordinated the fieldwork within the two regional associations. After the data were collated and analysed by NZCER, draft summaries of the findings were circulated to the participating playcentre associations. Members of the Education Committee of Playcentre Federation discussed and commented on the findings before this report was completed.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to investigate how to cater effectively for the needs of the children aged 2 1/2 years who attend playcentre sessions and for the needs of those around them.

The study has two parts: firstly a questionnaire was completed by the centre advisor in consultation with the supervisor or supervising parents at each playcentre, and secondly an observation of each child aged under 2 1/2 years was carried out during a playcentre session. This report therefore outlines both the views and experiences of the supervising adults, and the experiences of the under 2 1/2-year-olds, for each of the playcentres located within two different regional associations.

METHOD

Participants

Characteristics of the Playcentres

Two regional playcentre associations participated: one larger association in the North Island with 19 affiliated playcentres, and one smaller association in the South Island with 8 playcentres. (Hereafter these two playcentre associations are named Association H or [H], and Association C or [C], respectively). Centre advisors completed a questionnaire in consultation with the supervisor or supervising parent at each of the 27 playcentres.

Almost all of the playcentres in Association H were located in urban areas, whereas almost all of the playcentres in Association C were in rural areas. In total 18 playcentres were situated in urban areas, 8 were in rural locations, and 1 served both an urban and a rural community.

The number of families on the rolls varied considerably, with a range of 7 to 55 families per playcentre, and an average of 23 families per playcentre. The number of families on the Association C rolls ranged from 7 to 48, and on the Association H rolls the range was from 8 to 55 families per playcentre. The total number of children aged under 2 1/2 years who were on the playcentre rolls was was 191, with a range of 0 to 31 and an average of 7 under 2 1/2 year olds per playcentre. Association C had a total of 56 children aged under 2 1/2 years on the rolls, and a range of 0 to 20 per playcentre. Association H had a total of 135 under 2 1/2 year olds on the rolls, with a range of 0 to 31 per playcentre.

There were 9 special needs children on the playcentre rolls. Association C had 3 special needs children, 1 at each of 3 playcentres. Association H had a total of 6 special needs children, with between 1 and 2 special needs children at 4 of the playcentres.

Comments made by the centre advisors, liaison officers, and supervisors about the composition of the rolls show that at 5 of the 27 playcentres, the under 2 1/2 year olds were not on the roll. However, at other playcentres, the children aged under 2 1/2 years were a major part of the total roll composition.

The Children Aged Under 2 1/2 Who Were Observed

In total, 112 under 2 1/2 year-olds were observed, 77 at the playcentres in the North Island association, and 35 at the playcentres of the South Island association. Details of the number and gender of the children observed are shown in Table 1. Almost equal numbers of boys and girls were observed, although

slightly more boys were observed at the South Island playcentres, and more girls were observed at the North Island playcentres.

Overall, the ages of the children observed ranged from 2 months to 2 years and 5 months. More younger infants were observed at the North Island playcentres where the ages ranged from 2 months to 2 years 5 months, than at the South Island playcentres, where the ages ranged from 6 months to 2 years 5 months. The number of children aged under 2 1/2 years attending the playcentre on the day of the observations ranged from 0 to 10, with an average of 4 children aged under 2 1/2 attending.

Procedure

Each centre advisor who gathered information from the playcentres was provided with a set of guidelines for procedures (see Appendix A). They completed both the questionnaire and the observations during one visit to the playcentre. The questionnaire was completed with the supervisor or supervising parent either before or after the playcentre session. (A copy of the questionnaire is included as Appendix B). The visits to the North Island playcentres all took place during an intermittently wet, rainy week in August, 1990. Visits to the South Island centres were also carried out during August 1990.

Observations of the children were recorded on the coding sheets provided (see Appendix C). Each child aged under 2 1/2 years was observed at 30-minute intervals throughout the playcentre session.

RESULTS

Experiences and Views of Supervisors: Provision for Children Aged Under 2 1/2 Years

Playcentre Sessions

The supervisors of the 27 playcentres reported that the number of sessions held at the playcentres varied from 1 to 7 per week. The number of these sessions which incorporated under 2 1/2-year-old children ranged from 0 to 7 across the playcentres, although at some centres young children aged under 2 1/2 years attended but were not on the roll.

There were pre-entry or starter groups at 7 (26%) of the playcentres. Pre-entry or starter sessions were more a feature of the South Island playcentres (Association C) than of the North Island ones (Association H). There were pre-entry or starter groups at 4 of the 8 Association C playcentres (50%), and at 3 of the 19 Association playcentres (16%). Playgroups were more typical of the playcentres from Association H, where 13 (68%) of the centres had playgroups. None of the playcentres in the Association C held playgroups. The 13 North Island association playcentres which held playgroups had between 8 and 24 children on the playgroup rolls. Five of the playcentres ran two playgroups and had two playgroup rolls.

When asked whether there had been any recent changes in the times or the sessions to cater for children aged under 2 1/2 years, the supervisors of 6 of the 27 playcentres replied that there had been changes. These changes included "finishing sessions earlier to cater for sleeps and lunch time for toddlers", starting an extra playgroup, and setting up pre-entry and starter groups.

Supervision

The number of adults who stayed throughout the session ranged from 2 at one playcentre to 5 to 9 at another playcentre. This varied partly in relation to roll size. The centre advisors, liaison officers, and supervisors made a variety of comments about the number of adults staying. For example, at the playcentre where two adults usually stayed during the session, the liaison officer commented:

> Because the roll number is low (12 families), usually only 2 adults, but the day I visited there were 9, some to meet the Health Department (visitors), plus a trainee nanny and myself.
> [C]

At the playcentre where from 5 to 9 adults usually stayed, there were 25 families on the roll, and the centre advisor commented:

> This (5 adults) is the 1:5 ratio. However, no under 2 1/2 year-old is left, so when they are here the adult number is much higher. Four extra parents are staying today. (7 children aged under 2 1/2 were observed at this session)
> [H]

At all of the playcentres the number of supervising adults staying throughout the session was above, and sometimes well above, the ratios required by regulation.

The levels of training of the adults staying throughout the session differed slightly from centre to centre. However, at most playcentres at least one adult had completed the supervisor training, and at all playcentres at least one adult had completed or almost completed assistant supervisor training.

Responses to the question, "What type of supervision operates?" showed that overall, almost equal numbers of centres were team supervised (14 playcentres) and under the supervision of a single supervisor (13 playcentres). However, team supervision was more usual within Association H where 13 of the 19 playcentres were team supervised, than at Association C where only 1 of the 8 centres was described as team supervised.

Facilities and Safety

Almost half of the playcentres were purpose built (12 playcentres, 44%). Another 4 playcentres were prefabricated buildings located in school grounds, 3 were buildings in school grounds, 3 were substantially adapted houses, 3 were minimally adapted community halls, 1 was a prefabricated building in a domain, and 1 was a minimally adapted house. Purpose built playcentres were more characteristic of Association H where 12 of the 19 playcentres were purpose built, than of Association C where 1 of the 8 playcentres was purpose built.

Responses to the question "How would you describe supervision of the outside area?" showed that for most playcentres, all areas were easy to supervise (11 playcentres, 41%) or most areas were easy to supervise (9 playcentres, 33%). At 16 (59%) of the playcentres, the fences and gates were considered adequate. At some of the 10 centres where the fences or gates were judged inadequate, theft was specified as a problem:

> Gate has recently been stolen. A replacement one is being made.
> [H]

At one playcentre, there was concern about an adjacent private swimming pool:

> Only a 3-foot-high netting fence separates the play area from the neighbour's large swimming pool. Negotiations are presently taking place with the reluctant pool owner about re-fencing.
> [C]

The parking areas were described as safe at 21 of the playcentres (78%), and unsafe at 6 of the playcentres (22%).

In Association H, where most of the playcentres are situated in urban areas, 14 playcentres had parking areas described as safe, and 5 described as unsafe. For Association C, where most of the playcentres are in rural areas, 7 of the 8 playcentres had parking areas which were considered safe.

Almost all of the playcentres were described as having safe access to the building. The fire safety equipment had been checked within the last 12 months at almost all of the playcentres. At 11 (41%) of the playcentres, the tap water temperature was set at a safe level, and at a further 13 (48%) of centres, there was no hot water available. At the 2 playcentres where the tap water temperature was not safely regulated, there were plans to have this done promptly: "A playcentre father is going to do this soon", "Intend to do this soon."

Physical Needs

In response to the question, "Where are napkins changed?" an almost equal number of playcentres responded "on the floor" and "on a changing table". In total, 13 (48%) of the playcentres were using the floor, 12 (45%) were using changing tables, and 2 reponses were coded as "other". The pattern of responses was similar across the two playcentre associations. Responses from the playcentres coded as "other" were:

> Special area set up for the purpose.
> [H]
>
> Wherever the mother feels comfortable, but they do have a table on order for that purpose.
> [C]

The timing of this study meant that when these questions were asked, a number of playcentres were working towards the minimum requirement standards.

When asked whether there was a quiet area for toddlers to sleep, 17 (63%) of the playcentres responded "yes", and 10 (37%) responded "no". More of the playcentres in Association H had a quiet sleeping area, with 14 replies of "yes" and 5 replies of "no". In Association C there were 3 replies of "yes" and 5 replies of "no". Some examples of comments made about playcentres which did have a quiet sleeping area were:

> A large, heated "resource" room is available for feeding and sleeping needs of toddlers.
> [H]
>
> Couch available in library/ puzzle corner. Quiet area also at other end of building - mothers' corner.
> [C]

One of the playcentres with no quiet sleeping area was housed in temporary accommodation. At another playcentre, an unsafe cot had been removed, and there was no quiet sleeping area at the time of the centre advisor's visit.

The young children's snacks were provided in a variety of ways. At 16 (59%) of the playcentres snacks were provided for the children in a group, at 7 (26%) of the playcentres they were provided as required, and and at 4 (7%) they were provided both as required and in a group. The comments recorded by centre advisors and liason officers show that there was often some flexibility about how the snacks were provided:

> (In a group) Mainly in a group, but children can eat at other times.
> [H]
>
> (Both in a group and as required) Babies' needs are attended to as required, toddlers take part in group morning tea.
> [H]
>
> (In a group) However it is OK to have food at other times, though not many children seem to.
> [H]
>
> (As required) Children choose to eat at their own time. A table is provided for that purpose.
> [C]

Similarly, there was some flexibility and some variation in where snacks were provided. Usually snacks were provided at a table (15 playcentres, 56%), or both in highchairs and at a table (9 playcentres, 33%). Occasionally they were provided at a combination of sites including a table, highchairs, and on the run; or on a trolley; or while sitting in a suitable area either indoors or outdoors.

Snacks were provided at some playcentres, but at others the children and parents brought their own food. Parents and children supplied their own food at all 8 playcentres in Association C. At 13 playcentres in Association H parents and children brought their own food, but at 6 centres in Association H, snacks were provided. The snacks provided at these 6 playcentres were listed by the supervisors and centre advisors, and they included: fruit, sandwiches, plain biscuits, raisins, crackers and cheese, toasties, Marmite/Vegemite and cheese crunchies, playcentre baking, and fruit juice.

Play and Activities

The reponses to the question "Are the toddlers specifically included in the programme?", show that about half of the playcentres specifically included the toddlers, while about half thought they did not include them specifically. The comments made here provide useful information about the inclusion of younger children in playcentre programmes:

(Yes, generally included) Most of the activities are fluid enough to cater for children of different levels and abilities.
[H]

(Yes) (The toddlers are) given dough to play with, paint to work with, space at the trough for them to work with flour, macaroni, and spaghetti. (They) join in with stories.
[H]

(Yes) They are usually just included in the play activities. Everything is available for their use - painting, collage, puzzles etc. They are encouraged to be involved at morning tea and (in) any organized end-of-session activities, e.g. music and birthday parties.
[H]

(Yes) The whole programme rotates around the toddlers and their needs.
[H]

(Yes, included) Playcentre sessions provide self-choice activities that all children can use in a way appropriate to their development. Surroundings are safe and young children are well supervised as their parents stay with them.
[C]

At almost all of the playcentres where the toddlers were not specifically included in the programme, the comments recorded suggest that the toddlers were quite welcome to join in:

(No, not specifically included) Included in activities if they are there, but nothing special provided.
[H]

(No, not specifically included) The toddlers are not specifcally included but the supervisor feels they seem to use the facilities provided at their own level.
[C]

At one or two playcentres, there was some concern about having separate facilities or play equipment for the under 2 1/2-year-old children:

(No, not specifically included) A few toys were brought along but somehow these have been mixed into general equipment.
[C]

Equipment

When the playcentre supervisors were asked whether there was suitable and sufficient equipment for toddlers, the majority responded that there was sufficient. In total, 22 playcentres (82%) responded that there was sufficient suitable equipment, 2 (7%) replied that there was insufficient, and 3 (11%) were uncertain.

The 22 supervisors or supervising parents who described their equipment as sufficient provided a variety of examples of suitable equipment. Responses about appropriate equipment included:

> Extra toddler trikes and push-a-long trolleys and ride-ons are provided. There is a box of baby toys available if necessary. Also a baby swing indoors. A walker and bouncinette are also available. A selection of easy puzzles is available and some board books.
> [H]

> Yes, (the) toddlers present used all the play equipment available e.g. silica sand, and water play equipment, pushchair and dolls, trainset and blocks, playdough, paints, sandpit/cars.
> [H]

> Simple puzzles, Quadro construction to climb on and play in, blocks, flour in water trough, dough, big ball, collage (paste, paint, felts), musical instruments, prams and dolls, rocking chairs.
> [H]

> Bouncinette, cot, swing for babies. Also good quality rattles etc. and an activity centre and play pen. Rocking horses, small blocks, good collection of plastic cars, sandplay and equipment, water/wheat play and equipment, dough.
> [H]

> Ride-on toys, rocking horses (2), baby toys.
> [H]

> Paints, dough, puzzles, slides, swings, sandpit etc. (are) all suitable and accessible for toddlers. Most of playcentre equipment is OK (for toddlers).
> [H]

> Simple puzzles - basic form boards and lift-out shape puzzles. Light-weight buggies - dolls, dress ups. Other family play equipment. Simple books - some board books. Low easels - for painting. Small coloured blocks. Some small squeezy toys.
> [H]

There is a bouncinette and a swing for babies for use inside. There isn't any special equipment that is put aside purely for the playgroups or younger siblings. Most of the playcentre equipment is suitable for use by younger children. Books that are most suitable for the younger children have been marked with a yellow sticker.
[H]

Rocking horse and rocking cradle, stage 1 puzzles, small cars and trucks.
[H]

Puzzles, playdough, painting, small bikes, sand and water play, musical instruments. Nothing specifically for toddlers apart from odd 'baby toys' and trolley to push.
[H]

Dolls, cots, blocks, basic puzzles, small baby toys, rocking horse, rag books, heavy card books, bouncers, walkers, highchairs, baby bath, potties, toddlers' feeding cups.
[H]

Posting box, rolling toys, soft toys, pull alongs.
[H]

Three highchairs, 2 baby swings, 2 baby rocking seats, changing table, bouncer, walker, portacot. Small puzzles are kept on high shelf out of toddlers' reach. All other equipment is available for them to use.
[H]

Mini tramp, indoor slide, activity centre for cot (although no other specific baby toys!) pushcarts, prams, form boards, multi coloured blooks, rocking horses.
[H]

Puzzles, blocks, musical instruments, family corner, collage, book (suitable for toddlers).
[C]

The supervisor feels that the following equipment - blocks, dough, paints, sand, swings, balls, mats, water, books, puzzles, and music - is suitable and sufficient.
[C]

Rocking horse, suitable ride-on toys, small dolls' prams to push, puzzles at appropriate level, posting box, and a baby box - containing soft toys, objects giving tactile experience, e.g. blocks, balls, cotton reels.
[C]

Sand, puzzles, water, music.
[C]

> Rocking horse, rocking chair horse, plastic play toys, pull along toys, soft toys, plastic books.
> [C]

> Ride-on toys, blocks, balls, puzzles at appropriate level, soft toys, dolls, dressing up clothes and shoes.
> [C]

One or two supervisors described strategies to provide more appropriate equipment for the infants and toddlers who attended playcentre sessions:

> (The supervisors) are going to consult with playgroup to see what they feel they need beyond what is provided. (They) want to get some brighter things to hang around and over the cot. Also are setting up a corner with a feeding chair for Mums to sit in, a carpet on the floor where younger children can be put. May get a playpen.
> [H]

At one playcentre, the equipment was described as suitable and sufficient, but the space available to set it up was considered inadequate:

> Space is the big problem at this playcentre. Activities have to be put away so a new activity can be brought out.
> [H]

At the three playcentres where the supervisors and centre advisors were uncertain about the adequacy of the equipment, these comments were recorded:

> (Uncertain) One box (beside heater unprotected) with blocks etc. (not very inviting).
> [H]

> (Uncertain) Currently no rocking horse or pushalongs. There are some baby toys.
> [H]

> (Uncertain/ambiguous) There is some suitable equipment but mostly just the basics - dolls, playdough, basic puzzles, baby's swing, sandpit. (The centre) could do with some books for babies, some smaller blocks, some easy puzzles.
> [H]

The two playcentres where the equipment was considered to be insufficient were both from Association C.

The Toddlers' Interaction With Adults

The responses to the question, "Which adults work with the toddlers?" suggest that the toddlers' own parents worked with them most, although supervisors and other parents were sometimes involved. In total, 13 (48%) playcentres responded that "mostly the toddler's own parents" worked with them, 6 (22%) replied that "supervisors and parents equally" worked with the toddlers, 5 (19%) responded "their own and other parents", and 3 responded "their own and other parents and supervisors equally". There were no major differences in the responses from Association H and Association C.

Examples of comments made by the playcentre supervisors and centre advisors were:

> (Own parents, other parents, and supervisors equally) Depending on the child, it is usually everyone. Some children prefer to interact only with their parents, but generally the supervisor and all other parents on the session take an active interest in the toddlers depending on the activity they and pursuing at the time.
> [H]
>
> (Supervisors and parents equally involved) although two babies were looked after mainly by their mothers.
> [H]
>
> (Mostly their own parents) No toddlers present (today). The mothers worked with their own babies.
> [H]
>
> (Supervisors and parents equally involved) During this observation the under 2-1/2s were working with their own parents and other parents as well as the supervisor.
> [H]
>
> (Mostly own parents for under 1; supervisors and parents equally involved - for 1 to 2 1/2 years). The older toddlers had little adult contact, in terms of working with them - they tended to wander around, and play at what they chose, and be ignored - unless in difficulties - needing noses wiped etc.
> [H]
>
> (Mostly their own parents) The tendency seems to be for the supervising team to be more involved when the children are outside, i.e. at swings, slides, bikes, sandpit. However if the child gets upset for any reason than the child's mother generally deals with the situation.
> [H]

(Mostly their own parents, sometimes supervisors and parents equally) On session surveyed, mostly their own parents.
[H]

(Their own and other parents) All parents on the session, as needs arise.
[H]

(Mostly their own parents) The supervisor did spend time with all of the children at some time during thesession, though this doesn't show in the observation.
[H]

(Their own and other parents) Depends on child.
[C]

(Mostly their own parents) Most of the toddlers seem to 'stick' to their mother throughout the session. Also, parents are responsible for own child under 2-1/2 years old.
[C]

(Mostly their own parents) But the 'grandma' helpers are very useful with the wee ones.
[C]

(Supervisors and parents equally involved) Parents who come and stay do this regularly so know all the children and relate to them well. Being parents of younger children makes them aware of the needs of these children (supervisor also has a 22 months old child).

(Mostly their own parents/supervisors and parents equally involved) Parents of under 2-1/2s seem to keep very close to their children.

At all playcentres, the responsibility for each child aged under 2 1/2 years lay with the parent. However, the comments suggest that at a few playcentres there was a collective responsibility, with all adults working with the toddlers.

Education, Workshops, and Training Needs

When the supervisors or supervising parents were asked, "Are extra parent education courses planned for working with children aged under 2 1/2 years?" 23 (85%) replied that there were no courses planned. However, one playcentre had held a baby workshop recently, and other centres were encouraging parents of toddlers to attend parent helper courses:

(No) Only the parent helper courses that are available to all parents in the centre although an effort is made to encourage the playgroup mothers to attend.

(No) Have held a baby-play workshop in late 1989. (about 9 months ago)

(No) Parent education covers all children.

(No) Parents of under 2 1/2 year-olds are encouraged to attend parent help courses.

Only four supervisors responded that courses were planned, and two of these mentioned the Early Childhood Development Unit's (ECDU's) role in organizing these courses:

(Yes) Not by the local playcentre, but the ECDU include such workshops, and the Playcentre Association may do.
[H]

(Yes) Not in the centre, but Association and ECDU (plan courses) which parents and supervisors attend.
[H]

Two playcentres planned to hold their own course or workshop focused on working with children aged under 2 1/2 years:

(Yes) Parent helper courses (are planned) to specifically include this area.
[H]

(Yes) Baby/toddler workshop planned.
[C]

Responses to the question, "How many supervising adults have training for working with children aged under 2 1/2 years?" ranged from 0 to 25. The responses and explanatory comments from each playcentre were:

0 - None specifically.
[H]

3 - Doing Assistants, Child development first part.
[H]

2 adults on this session have their Assistant Supervisor Certificates, but are not necessarily particularly trained for working with under 2 1/2 year olds. However, everyone on the session is a "mother" and therefore has had a 2 1/2 year old.
[H]

2 - Assistants' training including child development course.
[H]

1 - Playcentre Supervisor certificate, but nothing more specific in training.
[H]

0 - Just the parent helper course.
[H]

0 - None specifically.
[H]

2 - Parent Helpers Course (also) included a little. General playcentre training involves child development including babies up.

9 - Includes Supervisor - and Assistant-trained personnel, and 1 has Karitane nursing qualifications.
[H]

6 - Parents with playcentre training only.
[H]

1 - Done parent help course.
[H]

1 - Childcare - New Zealand Certificate in Childcare, Wellington Polytechnic.
[H]

3 - All complete Playcentre Assistants training.
[H]

0 - Nil
[H]

2 - 2 mothers who regularly do mother helps have done daycare training and have extensive experience of daycare work.
[H]

1 - Workshop - The Supervisor attended a worthwhile session on under 2 1/2 year olds at the beginning of the year - mainly emphasized adapting basic equipment/corners for under 2 1/2s.
[H]

5 - The Child Development course which is community based and is part of the Playcentre Assistant/Supervisor course.
[H]

6 parents - As (working with under 2 1/2s) is included in the training programme to part 3-5 parents. To supervisor level, 1 parent - supervisor plus extra course in working with under 2s.
[C]

1 - The supervisor is a Karitane Nurse.
[C]

25 - Training consists of rearing children themselves who have gone through these stages. (plus baby-play workshop).
[C]

5 - Five parents have completed the (Association's) Supervisor Training Certificate.
[C]

(Unspecified number) Playcentre training.
[C]

3 - A small section in our Parent's Course (Supervisor Training.
[C]

(Unspecified number) Training has come from rearing children of that age. Further training provided through supervisor course.
[C]

These comments suggest variations in interpretation of the question and in the extent to which playcentre training was viewed as preparation for working with children aged under 2 1/2 years. The responses also illustrate the range and types of infant-toddler courses the supervising adults had attended.

The centre supervisors described the type of assistance they would appreciate receiving. In response to the question, "On what aspects of development or care would the supervising adults like more help?" 12 (44%) of the playcentres requested no help, 9 (33%) requested workshops on children aged under 2 1/2 years, 4 (15%) asked for more parent helper courses or parent education, 1 needed more space, and 1 mentioned help with special needs children.

A few supervisors clearly saw the needs of the older children as more important at their centres:

(No help needed) (We) are more concerned with running session and play activities for the older children.
[H]

Others mentioned some difficulties but requested no specific assistance:

Probably nothing. One supervisor with baby feels frustrated when her baby is grizzly or needs cuddles a lot and she doesn't have much energy/time/arms to spend with the other children - but realizes there's nothing else that could be done.[H]

One of the 4 supervisors who asked for more parent education regarded the children aged under 2 1/2 years as the parents' responsibility:

At a session the supervising of under 2 1/2s is the responsibility of the child's parents. The supervisor feels that the parents need advice on helping to develop the children's skills e.g. manipulation.
[H]

The 9 playcentres requesting workshops included 7 from Association H and 2 from Association C. Comments made by some supervisors explain the type of focus they would like to see in such workshops:

> Workshop specifically on play activities for under 2 1/2s.
> [H]
>
> Specific ideas for activities for under 2 1/2s.
> [H]
>
> Coping with tantrums. Suitable activities for younger stages of development.
> [H]
>
> Planning for safe areas for under 2 1/2s.
> [H]
>
> Particular activities aimed at the age group.
> [H]
>
> Occasional workshops on developing and extending play for these age groups.
> [C]
>
> Association workshops providing ideas on utilizing of playcentre equipment for under 2 1/2s.
> [C]

In summary, about one third of the participating playcentres requested workshops concerned with play activities, supervision, or planning for children aged under 2 1/2 years who attend playcentre.

Experiences and Views of Supervisors:
Impact of Children aged Under 2 1/2 on Those Around Them

Duration of the Session Attended by the Under 2 1/2s

When asked, "How long do the under 2 1/2 year olds stay at the play sessions?" the centre advisors' and liaison officers' responses showed that the duration of stay was most frequently 2 to 3 hours. The average stay in hours was 1 to 2 hours at 3 (11%) of the playcentres, 2 hours at another 3 (11%) of the playcentres, 2 to 3 hours at 20 (74%) of the playcentres, and 3 hours at 1 playcentre.

The under 2 1/2 year olds appeared likely on average to stay longer at the Association H playcentres than at the playcentres from Association C. The 3 playcentres reporting stays of 1 to 2 hours were from Association C, whereas the playcentre with an average stay of 3 hours was from Association H.

The children aged under 2 1/2 years often accompanied their older siblings:

> (2 1/2 hours) They can be at playcentre up to 2 1/2 hours. Sometimes they are only accompanying their siblings arriving and leaving. It varies from session to session. They are always with a parent. [H]

> (2 1/2 hours) Normally (the under 2 1/2s are) siblings who stay while mothers are supervising or helping. During this survey extra children arrived later with parents to do observations. [H]

> (1 1/2 hours) Often the children that stay for only a short time have older brothers and sisters. Mum often stays for an hour or so when the older one is dropped off, then returns 3/4 hour before the session ends, so the under 2 1/2 year old gets some time at the session. [C]

Children aged under 2 1/2 years who stayed throughout the duration of the session often had parents with supervising or parent helping responsibilities:

> (2-3 hours) Usually all session while their parent is on duty. [H]

> (3 hours) (The under 2 1/2s) are the children of supervisors or parent helps who are there before the session and leave after the end. [H]

At some playcentres, parent helpers with young children left the session earlier if their toddlers were tired:

(2 1/2 hours) Sometimes suggest that parents take them home a little earlier if they get tired and grizzly.
[H]

(2 1/2 hours) One helper left when her child was tired - another adult came to take over her duty. Original helper had just one child (under 2 1/2), while other under 2 1/2 was a sibling and stayed the entire session.
[H]

On average then, the under 2 1/2 year olds tended to come to the playcentre session with their mother and an older sibling, and tended to stay at playcentre for about 2 to 3 hours.

Supervisors' Views on Having Children Aged Under 2 1/2 at Playcentre Sessions

Varying responses were recorded when the centre advisors or liaison officers asked the supervisors or supervising adults for their views on having children aged under 2 1/2 at playcentre sessions. Some supervisors made very positive comments on the impact of younger children on those around them:

Very good for their development and relationships and that of older children and parents. Teaches socializing and nurturing.
[C]

Supervisors are happy to have under 2 1/2s at their playcentre sessions. They feel they give balance to the session. Older children can gain understanding of the younger children and they can offer leadership to the younger children. Younger children learn such a lot from the examples of older children. Having under 2 1/2s offers challenges of helping a child grow in self-esteem and independence. Sometimes getting past the mother is difficult in that she is instructing the child in what to do and answering questions on the child's behalf. It is encouraging and rewarding to watch a young child grow and flourish during its playcentre years.
[C]

They feel it is very important to include them in the session for the older children to learn from the younger and vice-versa. Playcentre is a family pre-school.
[H]

Other supervisors, although they were happy to have under 2 1/2 year olds at their playcentre sessions, did mention potential problems like mess and equipment maintainance:

> Doesn't worry them (the supervisors). Only time (the under 2 1/2s) cause a problem is at cleaning up time - always some there and tend to get in the way.
> [H]

> The supervisor thinks it is "fine" to have them in the session, as long as the parent knows that they (the parents) are responsible for the child. The supervisor can keep an eye on them, but ultimately the parents are responsible. Parents are also responsible for teaching the proper use and care of equipment.
> [C]

Two supervisors expressed the view that they were happy to accommodate siblings of the older children, but they emphasized that children aged under 2 1/2 or 3 years were catered for by playgroups or starter sessions:

> She (the supervisor) would be happy to have under 2s, but the roll composition does not allow spaces for very young children.
> [C]

> (The supervisors) are happy to accommodate siblings on sessions as required i.e. when (their parents are) parent helping and supervising. The usual commencement age is 3 years and as a playgroup is operating, the younger children are catered for on that session.
> [H]

A few supervisors expressed concern about interruptions to the older children's work:

> One (supervisor) did not mind at all, (she) quite liked having the little ones around. One (supervisor) found with the limited space the little ones kept getting into the other children's work - (she commented:) "little ones just love to do that."
> [H]

> Playcentre doesn't really cater for them - can be a problem with some activities. - spend a lot of time "cleaning them up". - OK as long as there's not too many of them because (they) require a lot of (supervision) time learning independent activities and older ones can be left to themselves too much.
> [H]

However, only 1 of the 27 playcentre supervisors whose views were canvassed, expressed a clearly negative perception of the impact of the younger children on the older ones around them:

> (The under 2 1/2s are) often seen as a nuisance and a problem. They can be disruptive when trying to do activities with older children.
> (Centre advisor's note: This centre is used very much as a pre-kindergarten centre, hence families aren't

there for long. There are low training levels - mothers tend to stand back and chat rather than supporting the children in their play).
[H]

Overall then, the supervisors generally had positive views on having children aged under 2 1/2 years at playcentre sessions.

When they were asked specifically about the advantages of having under 2 1/2s at playcentre sessions, the supervisors from 25 (93%) of the playcentres described specific advantages. There were 2 (7%) supervisors who were unable to identify any advantages (one from each of the two participating playcentre associations).

Of the 25 supervisors who made statements about advantages, 24 mentioned the advantages experienced by children attending mixed age group sessions. These advantages were concerned largely with the children's socialization, for example learning to share with and care for other children. Some examples were:

> Sharing, tolerance, co-operation, language.
> [C]

> Excellent for only children - learning to cope. Awareness of different sizes of children. Good for under 2s - contact with other children.
> [C]

> Huge advantages - by the time they get to playcentre themselves they are part of the place know their surroundings well and some of the adults too, as well as what happens at playcentre. Mothering and tolerance for the older children, co-operation. It makes it more like home and real life to have the under 2 1/2s present.
> [H]

> Brings out nurturing instincts in older children, especially in family play. Toddlers learn how equipment is used at playcentre by watching older children.
> [H]

> For older children - helps from develop nurturing habits and attitudes towards the younger. (Centre advisor's note: This is one of our Associations few true 0-5 centres. There is a real family atmosphere here with young babies through to nearly 5 year olds).
> [H]

> Creates a happy family atmosphere of caring and sharing. Young ones learn from the older children and the older ones from the younger. It's especially nice for children without younger siblings to have the contact with that age group to learn tolerance and understanding.
> [H]

Advantages related to the children's learning needs and development were mentioned by some supervisors:

> It teaches the older children to take care of the wee ones. It can show the older children how far they have come. Helps the wee ones to develop by copying the older children.
> [C]

> Younger children temper sessions. Both younger and older children learn from each other, by consideration, understanding and example.
> [C]

> Children learn to make allowances for children that are younger and/or less able than themselves, they accept that not everyone is at the same level of development as themselves. Under 2 1/2s develop more quickly by following the examples set by older children.
> [H]

In addition to the advantages already mentioned for children, 4 supervisors commented that there were advantages for adults when children aged under 2 1/2 were included in playcentre sessions:

> Gets the mothers here. Creates a family environment. Encourages older children to care for younger ones.
> [H]

> Gives the children a chance to interact with the varying age groups. Helps develop awareness of the age groups in both children and adults.
> [C]

For one supervisor, the advantages were seen mainly in terms of adults' needs:

> Having mothers along too, without the little ones it would be most unlikely that some would stay. Good company for lonely mums. Yes, I agree with it.
> [H]

However, the experiences of another supervisor led her to conclude that the inclusion of children aged under 2 1/2 years in the playcentre sessions was more advantageous for the children than for the adults:

> For them (the under 2 1/2s), they enjoy it. They are future playcentre children. Also (good) for the older children to get used to them (the younger ones). Not so much of for adults/parents and supervisors.
> [H]

In summary, almost all of the playcentre supervisors described some advantages of having young children aged under 2 1/2 years at playcentre sessions. Most supervisors believed the age mix helped older and younger children to learn about sharing and caring, and several mentioned the advantage of keeping families and siblings together.

Recommended Changes

When asked what could be done differently for the under 2 1/2s, 9 (33%) of the supervisors responded that nothing needed to be done differently. Of the 18 (67%) who made suggestions about changes, 6 mentioned equipment, 4 commented on play activities, 3 made recommendations about infants or toddlers having their own space, 2 suggested changes in adult supervision, 1 needed safe fencing and gates, 1 wanted to see the under 2 1/2s included on the roll, and 1 mentioned awareness in general of the children aged under 2 1/2.

The supervisors' suggestions about equipment were:

> Provide more toys.
> [C]
>
> Equipment (could be) checked for safety and placement. Check equipment for height e.g. water trough.
> [C]
>
> Provide more things that they enjoy, such as messy play, clay, and books.
> [C]
>
> More suitable equipment provided and mothers made aware that their needs have to be met too.
> [H]
>
> Making sure that there adequate play materials for toddlers e.g. small bikes.
> [H]
>
> The provision of a special baby toys box. More carpet area.
> [H]

Their suggestions about activities included:

> Perhaps specific activity provided as an alternative when something more difficult is being undertaken by the older group.
> [H]
>
> More songs that the younger children could enjoy. An under 2 1/2 year old box with suitable equipment for them to use.
> [H]

Time - activities directly introduced for them. Supervisors feel responsible to older children on session.
[H]

The supervisors who suggested setting aside space for the children aged under 2 1/2 expressed concern about meeting the infants' needs and the needs of those around them. In addition, one centre advisor recorded these notes:

While doing this survey I was asked if it was permitted to block off a corner of the playcentre to restrict babies to a certain area so that parents wouldn't be forever rescuing them from dangerous or messy situations.
(Not suggested by this playcentre's supervisor)

The two supervisors who made recommendations about adult supervision of the children aged under 2 1/2 commented:

(It would help to) have a supervisor attached or given responsibility for them (the under 2 1/2s) at the session.
[H]

(We) would like to see more parents spending time with a group of under 2 1/2s.
[H]

The supervisors who had no changes to suggest tended to be very satisfied with the provision for made for children aged under 2 1/2 years and for those around them:

Playcentre provides an interesting, stimulating environment for under 2 1/2s as is.
[C]

Nothing (needs changing). Parents like to include the older toddlers in play activities if they choose.
[H]

Observations of Children Aged Under 2 1/2 Years

Activities Observed Among the Children Aged Under 2 1/2 Years

The 112 children aged under 2 1/2 years who were observed were engaged in a wide range of indoor and outdoor activities, and they used a variety of types of equipment. Overall, the most frequently observed activities were eating (50 incidents observed, 10% of all observed incidents), cuddling or being cuddled by own mother (39 incidents, 8%), and sandpit activities (30 incidents, 6%). Table 2 gives further details of the types of activities observed, and how frequently they occurred.

Separate information for Association C and Association H is presented in Tables 3 and 4. Sandpit activities and sandplay, playdough, and moving, walking or crawling were observed most frequently for Association C. Eating; being cuddled or held by own parent; sitting or sleeping in buggy or stroller; blockplay, pegboard or stacking; and play with puzzles and playdough, were most frequently observed at Association H centres (Table 4). More younger babies were observed at Association H, which may account for some differences in the activities were observed.

Nurturing/ Obstructing Behaviour

At each 30-minute interval throughout the playcentre session, the observers recorded any incidents of nurturing or obstructing behaviour that occurred between each child aged under 2 1/2 and the older children around him or her. More nurturing incidents than obstructing incidents were observed.

For Association C, a total of 14 nurturing and obstructing incidents was recorded. The most frequently occurring type of incident was that of an older child helping or nurturing a younger child (7 incidents). These incidents were:

> A 4 year old offers a male toddler some playdough.
> (5 children were observed at this Association C playcentre, no other nurturing or obstructing incidents were recorded)
>
> A boy aged 22 months is helped into a circle by other older children then by the supervisor.
> (The context is a music session at an Association C playcentre, 11:45 a.m., 14 children and 2 adults were present)
>
> Older sister pulls her younger sister aged under 2 1/2 years in trolley.
> (Outside on the grass in a trolley, 10 a.m., no adults interacting, 1 child present - sister aged 3 years 5 months)
>
> Older brother chatting to his sister aged 20 months. Playing together in the sandpit.
> (Outside digging in the sandpit, 11 a.m.; 1 adult

visitor, brother aged 3 1/2, 1 child aged 13 months also present)

Older brother "helping" his younger sister aged 21 months with play dough.
(Inside at play dough table, 9:30 a.m., 1 adult described as "another parent", and child's brother aged 4 1/2 years present)

A 4 1/2 year old child helps a boy aged 2 years 3 to get a tractor out of the shed.
(Outside at shed, 10 a.m., own parent and 2 older children present, 1 aged 4 1/2 and 1 aged 22 months)

A boy aged 2 years 5 months is instructed by an older child to hold another child's hand during mixed age musical session "D hold (girl's name's) hand".
(11:45 inside, 2 adults present)

Incidents where an older child was obstructing or forbidding a younger child were the next most frequent (6 incidents). These incidents included:

An older child aged 4 years brings a hose into the sandpit and says "Don't touch that" to a boy aged 2 years 5 months.
(Outside, 11 a.m., no adults interacting)

A 4 year old girl pushes the same boy (aged 2 years 5 months) ahead of her.
(11:30 a.m. outside play area at far end of grounds, no adults interacting with these children)

Boy (aged 3 years) takes puzzle pieces from his infant brother (aged 6 months). Mother says "Leave him".
(Inside at the puzzle table, 10:30 am., no other children or adults interacting)

Brother (aged 4 years) screams "don't (child's name)" to his younger sister (aged 21 months) as she bounces on rope.
(The rope is stretched across the outside play area, 11.30 a.m., no adults interacting)

Child aged 4 1/2 years puts his arms around the blocks, obstructing infant (boy aged 11 months)' access to them.
(Inside, blocks area, 9:00 a.m., mother only adult present, 4 1/2 year-old only other child)

Older child takes crayons from a boy aged 21 months. The boy's mother intervenes.
(Inside, at collage/drawing table very briefly, 9:30 a.m., mother only adult present, 1 child aged 3 years 8 months and 1 child aged 4 years 2 months present)

No instances of a younger child helping or nurturing an older

child were observed. There was 1 incident where a younger child was seen obstructing an older child:

> Boy aged 17 months obstructs his own brother (aged 3 years) by removing his hammer and peg set.
> (9:35 a.m., own parent only adult present, own brother only child present)

About half of the 14 incidents occurred between siblings. More than half of the incidents were positive and involved nurturing or helping.

At the Association H playcentres, a total of 19 nurturing and obstructing incidents was recorded. Again, the most frequently observed behaviour was that of an older child helping or nurturing a younger child (12 incidents). The older children's nurturing behaviour included:

> A girl aged 6 months is crying constantly. An older girl (aged 3 years) is playing and attempting to comfort her.
> (On carpeted floor area designed to be baby's area, 11 a.m., 1 adult - the child's mother, and 1 girl aged 3 years present)

> Older sister cuddles infant brother aged 3 months.
> (Inside in the "quiet corner", 11:30 a.m. - infant has just woken after sleeping from arrival at 9 a.m. to after 11 a.m., 6 adults present - 2 supervisors, 2 parents, 2 carers, 10 children present - 5 under 2 1/2)

> An older child (aged 3 years 9 months) helps child lift a buggy on and off the mini tramp (nurturing).
> (Inside in the block area, 11:15 a.m., no adults present, 1 older child 3 years 9 months)

> Girl aged 21 months stands by highchair, asking to get in. An older child (aged 3 years 9 months) responds and stays with her until an adult comes.
> (Inside the kitchen, 9:30 a.m., 1 adult - her own parent - and 1 child aged 3 years 3 months present)

> An older child (aged 4 years) talks to toddler (a girl aged 18 months), gives her dough, and encourages her to play.
> (Inside at playdough table, 10:15 a.m., 1 adult - Dad-parent help present, also 4 other children - 3 aged 3 years, 1 aged 4 years)

> An older child (aged 3 years 3 months) offers boy (aged 17 months) a turn at playing with a truck.
> (Outside by gate, 10:15 a.m., no adults present, 1 child aged 3 years 3 months present)

> Younger child (a girl aged 18 months) is sitting on older child's knee.
> (In the library area, 11:00 a.m., 1 adult - own parent

present, and 3 older children - 1 aged 4 years, 1 aged 3 years, and 1 aged nearly 3 years)

Older sister (aged 2 years 9 months) pushes infant sister (aged 7 months) on indoor baby swing. Mother tells sister to stop.
(Inside, 10:16 a.m., 1 adult-mother, 1 older child-sister present)

A 4-year-old includes infant (a boy aged 10 months) in the family play, saying "this is my baby..."
(Inside, family corner, 11 a.m., 1 adult-grandmother - present, and 2 older children aged 4 years and 3 years 6 months)

Girl aged 3 years 6 months holds younger child (a girl aged 2 years 5 months) "so she doesn't go down the slide until a cushion is at the bottom".
(Outside on large slide, 11:30 a.m., 1 adult-supervisor and 1 older child-age 3 years 6 months - present)

The same older girl (aged 3 years 9 months) puts the the same younger girl (aged 2 years 5 months) into the bed in the family corner.
(Inside, 12 m.d., no adults interacting, 2 older children present)

(The same) older girl (aged 3 years 9 months) pushes a younger girl (aged 2 years 3 months) who is swinging on the large swing.
(Outside, 11:35 a.m., 1 adult - supervisor present, 1 older girl - 3 years 9 month - present)

Incidents where an older child obstructs or forbids a younger child were also recorded at the Association H playcentres. In total, 6 of these incidents were observed. They were:

An older child (a girl aged 3 years) pours water on the boy's head and down his front, then takes a tin from him. An adult intervenes.
(The toddler under observation was a boy aged 15 months. The setting was outside at the water trough at 11:20 a.m. 1 adult-not the boys's parent, and 3 other children - girl 3, girls 2 years 9 months, boy 1 year 11 months were present)

An older boy (aged 4 1/2 years) says "You can't come in my house", and pushes the child away.
(Inside - on the centre of the floor where a Quadro house is sited, 11:20 a.m., no adults interacting, 1 older boy aged 4 1/2 years present)

A boy aged 3 years "shoos" child (a girl aged 23 months) away when she approaches the puzzles.
(Inside in the block area, 10:15 a.m., no adults interacting, boy aged 3 interacting, no other children present)

A 4-year-old asks an 18 month old child to get out of the swing. The younger child pretends to sleep in the swing.
(Outside at swings, 11:45 a.m., no adults interacting, 1 child aged 4 years 3 months present)

An older child tries to take a jug from the toddler (a boy aged 12 months), who is pouring water from the jug. The assistant supervisor prevents older child from taking it.
(Outside during water play at the baby bath, 10:30 a.m., 3 adults - assistant/mother and 2 grandparents present, 2 older children 1 aged 18 months, 1 aged 3 years present)

The infant (a girl aged 10 months) is playing with puzzle blocks on the floor. An older child aged 2 years 7 months climbs over her, takes blocks away, and throws them up in the air. The infant is not hurt (the blocks miss her). Infant picks up blocks again, older child leaves.
(Inside in the middle of the floor, 12 mid-day, 1 adult-another parent present, plus 1 older child - 2 years 7 months)

At the Association H playcentres too, very few incidents were initiated by the younger children. No incidents were observed of a younger child helping or nurturing an older child. There was only one incident recorded where a younger child aged under 2 1/2 years obstructed an older child:

Girl (aged 10 months) kicks an older boy (aged 2 years 4 months) as he arrives at the trough. Boy squawks and moves to the other side of the trough (he ignores her).
(Inside at trough with flour - wet day, 10:45 a.m. no adults present, 1 boy 2 years 4 months)

The observational data for Association H show then, that almost two thirds (63%) of the recorded incidents of interaction between the older and younger children were positive, that is they involved nurturing or helping behaviour. Two of these incidents took place between siblings, with the older siblings nurturing their younger siblings.

Transfer of Materials

Relatively few incidents were recorded of a child aged under 2 1/2 years transferring materials from one site to another. At the Association C playcentres, one observer noted that on one occasion between observation times, a puzzle was brought to the play dough table. Two other incidents were described at another Association C playcentre:

Child (a girl aged 15 months) takes musical shaker across the room from the musical area to the mat.

(Inside on mat, 9:25 a.m., 1 adult - own mother present, no other children present)

Child (boy aged 21 months) wanders, picking things up and putting them down, throughout the centre.
(Inside, 9:55 a.m., mother present - took child home after this, having dropped off older sister)

For Association H, 10 incidents of transfer of materials were recorded across the 19 playcentres. These incidents were:

Boy (aged 22 months) carries stones from the garden to the water trough.
(Outside at the water trough, 11:30 a.m., 1 adult - another parent, and 4 other children present - 1 girl agead 3 years, 1 boy aged 2 years 11 months, and 1 boy aged 2 years 9 months)

Girl (aged 20 months) brings a doll to the couch.
(Inside sitting on couch with her mother and a doll, 10:05 a.m., 1 adult - her own mother, and no other children present)

Boy (aged 20 months) carries Duplo to another area.
(Inside at Duplo area, 9:45 a.m., 1 adult - own parent present, no other children interacting)

Girl (aged 19 months) carries food from rug outside to inside area.
(10:55 a.m., no adults nearby, 1 13-month toddler present)

Girl (aged 2 1/2 years) is walking across the floor, following her mother, carrying 3 dolls.
(Inside, 11:30 a.m., mother present, no other children present)

Toddler (a boy aged 12 months) moves from block corner, dropping a block as he leaves.
(Inside at block corner, 11 a.m., no adults or other children interacting)

The same child (boy aged 12 months) climbs on chair in the music corner, pulls down instruments, then moves from music corner leaving an instrument on the floor.
(Inside at music corner, 11:30 a.m., no adults or other children interacting with him)

Girl (aged 18 months) pushes doll in a pram up and down the ramp. Leaves pram outside, follows older children inside to library corner.
(Outside - Inside 11:30 a.m., 2 adults present - mother and assistant supervisor)

The same child (girl aged 18 months) takes a book to the puzzle corner. Looks at it for a few minutes then drops it and plays with a puzzle.
(Inside, puzzles table, 11:30 a.m., 1 adult present -

supervisor, and 4 older children aged: 2 years 9 months, 3 years 8 months, 3 years, 3 years 8 months - all girls)

Girl (aged 2 years 5 months) takes a puzzle and carries it to the collage table where her mother is sitting.
(Inside, transfer from puzzle area to collage table, 10:32 a.m., 1 adult - mother - present, no other children present)

In summary, some toddlers aged under 2 1/2 years transferred materials from one area of the playcentre to another. However, relatively few of these incidents were recorded at the playcentres from both Association C and Association H.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This small-scale pilot study shows that the supervisors of 27 playcentres located within two different regional associations described many aspects of the playcentres' provision for children aged under 2 1/2 years as adequate. At a few playcentres, supervisors or supervising parents identified the need for further attention to safety features such as fencing and gates.

Most of the supervisors thought the playcentres had sufficient and suitable equipment for infants and toddlers. In addition, the observational records show that the toddlers often used the same equipment as the older children. The observations suggest that sand; playdough; blocks, construction toys, and pegboards; painting; musical activities; puzzles; the family corner; books; and water play were the main activities spontaneously used by children aged under 2 1/2 years.

Transfer of materials from one part of the playcentre to another was observed relatively infrequently. In view of the occasional incidents described in this report though, and the comments from a few supervisors that mess and equipment maintenance are the only problems when under 2 1/2s attend playcentre sessions, further development of strategies for cleaning up may help the supervisors in some instances.

Supervisors of about a third of the playcentres requested more workshops focused on children aged under 2 1/2 years. Their responses suggest a need for ongoing workshops and courses concerned with play activities and equipment, planning, and safe areas for children aged under 2 1/2 years who attend playcentre.

This report contains some very positive comments about the impact of children aged under 2 1/2 years on those around them. The supervisors of almost all of the playcentres could identify some advantages of having children aged under 2 1/2 years at playcentre sessions, although at one or two centres, the supervisors found it difficult to cater for under 2 1/2 year olds as well as the older children. The advantages of having children aged under 2 1/2 at playcentre sessions were concerned mainly with the children's social development and their learning to share with, care for, nurture, and understand children of different ages. Another advantage identified by some supervisors was that younger and older children learn from one another. Benefits for the parents were also mentioned.

The results of the observations of the children's interactions seem consistent with the supervisors' statements about sharing and caring. Although there was a relatively long interval of 30 minutes between observations, the observational procedure used in this study allowed the interactive experiences of every child aged under 2 1/2 years to be observed intermittently throughout the same playcentre session. The findings suggest that more nurturing than obstructing behaviour occurs between under 2 1/2 year old children and the older

children at playcentre sessions. However, the tendency for some of the older children and older siblings to obstruct the younger ones, and the very rare incidents where under 2 1/2s obstructed older children, support the need for ongoing adult involvement at sessions attended by children aged from birth to 5 years.

The observations show that the adults who interacted with the children aged under 2 1/2 years were usually the children's own parents. The observers often recorded that a child was being cuddled or held by his or her mother, and in one or two cases by the father. A few of the supervisors made suggestions about adult involvement when they were asked about changes they would like to make to cater for the children aged under 2 1/2 and those around them. For example, supervisors at two of the playcentres recommended having a supervisor or a parent accept responsiblity for a small group of under 2 1/2 year olds at each playcentre session.

This small-scale study suggests that many supervisors believe that playcentre caters for children aged from birth to 5 years, their parents, and sometimes other family members. It includes some preliminary recommendations from the supervisors about future planning to cater for children aged under 2 1/2 years at playcentres. The study was developed collaboratively and any suggestions or recommendations are based on the playcentre participants' experiences.

Table 1

Number of Boys and Girls Aged Under 2 1/2 Years Observed at Each Playcentre

Centre	Girls	Boys	Total
C01	1	4	5
C02	1	5	6
C03	2	0	2
C04	1	3	4
C05	1	4	5
C06	1	0	1
C07	3	4	7
C08	3	2	5
Association C Total	13	22	35
H01	1	3	4
H02	3	2	5
H03	0	0	0
H04	3	2	5
H05	3	2	5
H06	2	0	2
H07	2	2	4
H08	1	2	3
H09	1	0	1
H10	2	1	3
H11	2	2	4
H12	2	0	2
H13	2	2	4
H14	0	1	1
H15	3	4	7
H16	1	2	3
H17	7	3	10
H18	4	3	7
H19	5	2	7
Association H Total	44	33	77
Total	57	55	112

Table 2

Activities Observed Among Playcentre Children Aged Under 2 1/2 Years - Total Sample

Activity	No. of Incidents	% of total incidents
Eating/morning tea/snacks	50	10
Cuddling own mother/father	39	8
Sandpit activities/sandplay	30	6
Sitting/sleeping in pushchair/buggy/stroller	29	6
Playdough	27	5
Block play/construction/ pegboard	25	5
Moving/walking/crawling	23	4
Painting	22	4
Music instruments/musical activity	22	4
Puzzles	20	4
Family corner play	15	3
Books/stories	14	3
Water trough/water play	13	2
Carpentry	12	2
Sleeping/lying in cot	12	2
Outdoor swing play	12	2
Outdoor balancing/climbing	11	2
Playing on slide	11	2
Drawing/cutting	10	2
Outdoors/pulling truck, tractor, trolley	10	2
Collage	9	2
Breastfeeding	8	1
Holding rattle	6	1
In backpack	6	1
Riding on toy/bike	6	1
Waiting passively	6	1
Pushing buggy/pram	6	1
Napkin change	4	1
Helped on/off with clothing	4	1
In walker	4	1
Playing with doll	4	1
Baking activity	3	1
On rocking horse	3	1
Sitting in highchair	3	1
Sleeping in swing	3	1
On minitramp	3	1
Other miscellaneous activities	28	5
Total	513	100

Note: Ages of the 112 children observed range from 2 months to 29 months.

Table 3

Activities Observed among Playcentre Children Aged Under 2 1/2 Years - Association C

Activity	Number of Incidents	%
Sandpit activities/sandplay	17	10
Play dough	13	8
Moving, walking, crawling	12	7
Morning tea/eating	10	6
Block play/pegboard	10	6
Painting	9	6
Carpentry	9	6
Musical instruments/musical activity	8	5
Cuddling/held by own mother	7	4
Water trough/water play	7	4
Climbing, balancing on outdoor equipment	7	4
Puzzles	6	4
Outdoor pushing/pulling, trucks, tractor, trolley	6	4
Playing on slide	5	3
Outdoor swing play	4	2
Drawing	4	2
Books, stories	4	2
Collage	3	2
Family corner play	3	2
Waiting passively	3	2
Bike/ride-on toy	2	1
Pushing buggy/pram	2	1
Baking activity	2	1
Sitting in pushchair/buggy	2	1
In backpack	2	1
Playing with ball	2	1
Miscellaneous single incidents	8	5
Total Observed Incidents	167	100

Note: Ages of the 35 children observed range from 6 months to 29 months.

Table 4

Activities Observed among Playcentre Children Aged Under 2 1/2 Years - Association H

Activity	Number of Incidents	%
Morning tea/eating/snacks	40	12
Cuddling/held by own parent	32	9
Sitting/sleeping in buggy/stroller	27	8
Block play/pegboard/stacking	15	4
Puzzles	14	4
Playdough	14	4
Musical instruments/musical activity	14	4
Sandpit activities/sand play	13	4
Painting	13	4
Family corner play	12	3
Lying/sleeping in cot	12	3
Moving/walking/crawling	11	3
Books/stories	10	3
Outdoor swing play	8	2
Breast feeding	7	2
Holding rattle	6	2
Collage	6	2
Water trough/water play	6	2
Playing on slide	6	2
Drawing/cutting	6	2
In back pack	4	1
Napkins change	4	1
In walker	4	1
Climbing/balancing on outdoor equipment	4	1
Bike/ride-on toy	4	1
Pushing buggy/pram	4	1
Outdoors pushing trucks/tractor/trolley	4	1
Helped on/off with clothing	3	1
Playing on the mini tramp	3	1
Sleeping in swing	3	1
Carpentry	3	1
Doll play	3	1
Sitting in high chair (no toys or food)	3	1
Waiting passively	3	1
Miscellaneous infrequent activities	25	7
Total observed incidents	346	100

Note: Ages of the 77 children observed range from 2 months to 29 months.
These observations took place during a wet week.

Appendix A

PLAYCENTRE STUDY OF CHILDREN AGED UNDER 2 1/2 YEARS

GUIDELINES FOR PROCEDURES

This study has two parts:

(1) a questionnaire to be completed in consultation with the supervisor or supervising parent(s) at the playcentre;

(2) an observation of the children aged under 2 1/2 years.

Please complete both the questionnaire and the observations during one visit to the playcentre. The observations must be carried out during a playcentre session, not a playgroup session or a starter session.

(1) **The Questionnaire**

Complete this in consultation with the supervisor or supervising parent(s), either before or after the session. Please answer all of the questions.

(2) **The Observation**

The intention of the observation is to observe and record what each child aged under 2 1/2 is doing, with whom, and in what area. Please record these observations on the coding sheets provided, using a separate page for each child. Write in your observations on each child at 30-minute intervals throughout the playcentre session.

Example: Your observations start at 9 a.m. and there are four under 2 1/2s attending the session. Complete the information at the top of four coding sheets (playcentre no., child's date of birth, etc.), using a separate page for each child. Then complete the first timed observation by selecting one of the four children, writing the time (9 a.m.) in the first box (top column on the left of the sheet), and completing the remaining boxes across the page (activity, adults present, children present, area/location, and any nurturing/obstructing). Repeat this procedure for each of the remaining three children, using the top column of his/her labelled coding sheet. Then at 9.30 a.m., observe each child aged under 2 1/2 years again, this time filling in 9.30 a.m. in the second box (on the left of the sheet under 'time'). At 10 a.m. fill in the third time box and complete the observations across the page for each child. Continue this procedure as above at 30-minute intervals until the session finishes, or until all four children aged under 2 1/2s have departed.

Thank you for your participation in this study. If you have any questions or problems, please ring Julie Aitken 669-188 or Dr Val Podmore at NZCER 847-939.

Appendix B

PLAYCENTRE STUDY OF CHILDREN AGED UNDER 2 1/2 YEARS

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CENTRE ADVISORS

This questionnaire is the first part of the Playcentre Study of Children Aged Under 2 1/2 Years (a small exploratory study). The aim of the project is to investigate how to cater effectively for the needs of children aged under 2 1/2 years at playcentre sessions, as well as the needs of those around them.

INSTRUCTIONS

Please complete this questionnaire by ticking or entering a number in the appropriate box. Write your comments or any other details in the space provided.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information collected will be used for research purposes. Playcentres will be allocated numbers and will not be identified by name.

This is a Playcentre project initiated by Hutt Valley Association, supported by Playcentre Federation, and carried out in consultation with the Families and Early Childhood Programme of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER).

SECTION A

Background Information

1. Where is the playcentre located?

   1. urban region [ ]
   2. rural region [ ]

2. How many families are on the roll?

   [ ]

3. What are the ages of the children on the roll?

   Number of children aged 4 years + [ ]
   Number of children aged between 2 1/2 and 4 years [ ]
   Number of children aged under 2 1/2 years [ ]

4. How many special needs children are on the roll?

   [ ]

5. Describe any other items of interest about the roll composition

SECTION B

Provision for Children Aged Under 2 1/2 Years

Sessions

6. How many sessions are held each week?

[ ]

7. How many sessions have rolls incorporating under 2 1/2-year-olds?

[ ]

8. Is there a pre-entry or starter group?

Yes [ ]
No [ ]

(If yes)

How many children attend? [ ]

Number of sessions each week? [ ]

Comments

9. Is there a playgroup?

Yes [ ]
No [ ]

(If yes)

How many children attend?

[ ]

10. Have there been any recent changes in times or sessions to cater for children aged under 2 1/2 years?

Yes [ ]
No [ ]

Comments

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Supervision

11. How many adults stay throughout the session?

[ ]

_____
_____
_____

12. What are the levels of training (completed or in progress) of the adults staying throughout the session?

(Insert the NUMBER of adults in each box)	Number
Supervisor or more	[ ]
Assistant supervisor or equivalent	[ ]
Parent helper or equivalent	[ ]
No training	[ ]

_____
_____
_____

13. What type of supervision operates?

Single supervisor [ ]
Team supervision [ ]
Group supervision [ ]

Facilities and Safety

14. How would you describe the building?

Purpose built	[ ]
Prefab. in school grounds	[ ]
Old house substantially adapted	[ ]
Old house minimally adapted	[ ]

15. How would you describe supervision of the outside area?

All areas easy to supervise	[ ]
Most areas easy to supervise	[ ]
Some areas difficult to supervise	[ ]
Difficult to supervise	[ ]

Comments (Specify why)

16. Are the fences and gates adequate?

Yes	[ ]
No	[ ]

Comments

17. Are the parking areas safe?

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

Comments

_____

_____

_____

18. Is the access to the building safe?

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

Comments

_____

_____

_____

19. Has the fire safety equipment been checked within the last 12 months?

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

Comments

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

20. Is the hot water supply to basins set at a safe temperature (around 40 degrees C)?

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

Comments

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Physical Needs

21. Where are napkins changed?

Floor [ ]
Table [ ]
Other [ ]
Comments

_____

_____

22. Is there a quiet area available if a toddler needs to sleep?

Yes [ ]
No [ ]
(If yes)
Specify where

_____

_____

_____

23. How are snacks provided?

As required [ ]
In a group [ ]
Comments

_____

_____

24. Where are snacks provided

In a highchair [ ]
At a table [ ]
'On the run' [ ]
Other [ ]
Comments

_____

_____

25. What snacks are provided?

_____

_____

Play and Activities

26. Are the toddlers specifically included in the programme?

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

(If yes)

Describe how they are included.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

27. Is there suitable and sufficient equipment for toddlers?

Yes, suitable and sufficient [ ]

No, unsuitable or insufficient [ ]

(If yes)

Give examples of suitable equipment

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

28. Which adults work with the toddlers?

Mostly their own parents [ ]

Their own parents and other parents [ ]

Supervisors and parents equally involved [ ]

Mostly supervisors [ ]

Comments

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

29. Are extra parent education courses planned for working with children aged under 2 1/2 years?

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

(If yes)

Give examples

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

30. How many supervising adults have training for working with children aged under 2 1/2 years?

Number [ ]

Where relevant, specify the type(s) of training

_____

_____

_____

_____

31. On what aspects of development or care would the supervising adults like more help?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

32. How long do the under 2 1/2-year-olds stay at the play sessions?

What is the average stay in hours [ ]

Comments

_____

_____

_____

_____

33. What are the supervisor's (or supervising parents') views on having children aged under 2 1/2 at playcentre sessions?

Probe

What are the advantages of having under 2 1/2s at sessions?

What could be done differently for the under 2 1/2s?

ASSOCIATION NUMBER [ ]

PLAYCENTRE NUMBER [ ]

ADVISOR/OBSERVER NUMBER [ ]

PLAYCENTRE OBSERVATIONS OF CHILDREN AGED UNDER 2½ YEARS

Playcentre No._____ Date of Birth: Date: Observers:

Child: Boy _____ Girl _____ (tick appropriate box) Time:

Time	Activity (Name the play activity or specify if sleeping, eating)	Adults Present		Children Present		Area/Location (Note any transfer of materials)	Nurturing/Obstructing (Record any nurturing or obstructing of toddler by older children, or vice versa)
		Number	Details (Own Parent/other parents/supervi	Number	Age(s)		

Other comments:

For Office Use: